

You've Been Named a Truman Fac Rep; Now What?

By Lori Colliander¹

So, you've been named a Truman Fac Rep. Having enjoyed serving as a full-time scholarship adviser, I am inclined to offer a heartfelt "Congratulations!" or "Lucky you." I found the work to be positively challenging and equally rewarding, though not at first. Initially, the work was daunting and seemingly unmanageable. Slowly though I got a handle on things and came up with some systems that helped me do my job more easily; eventually I saw the forest through the trees.

In your new role you may be thinking, as I did, "Where on Earth do I begin?" "What is expected of me?" "How is it that I can fulfill these responsibilities while doing the other parts of my job?" To help you get started, I offer some advice from my experience advising students at the University of Washington and from conversations I have had with talented colleagues engaged in similar work on other campuses.

Understand your role

The Truman Scholarship Foundation defines Faculty Representative as the person who "establishes a process to select the institution's nominees, helps nominees prepare for the competition, and submits the nomination materials to the Foundation by the specified deadline." Depending on the organization of your campus and how you ended up in the role of Truman Fac Rep the way you go about your Truman work will likely differ from how Fac Reps on other campuses serve in this role.

For instance, a Fac Rep on a campus whose administration has explicitly committed itself to institutionalizing a nomination process for many nationally competitive scholarships (Truman included) will proceed much differently (and face a different set of challenges and rewards) than a Fac Rep who for the first time has been approached by a student interested in being nominated, or from a Fac Rep who may not nominate candidates every year.

Learn from others who know about the Truman competition

There may be people on your campus who have previously served as Truman Fac Rep. Get in touch with these individuals to learn from their experiences. Such conversations may help you from having to reinvent the wheel. Similarly, contact any students on your campus who participated in the previous year's competition. If there is no one on your campus who knows anything about the competition, consider contacting others at nearby institutions; I've found folks in this line of work to be very willing to answer questions and talk through ideas.

Shortly after I began coordinating the nomination procedures for many national scholarships, I visited the long-time Associate Director of my campus' honors program. He had been directly involved with some of the national scholarship programs through serving on many screening committees. He even had organized a few over the years. He has an institutional memory that few have on my campus, which I

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took full advantage of when I was starting out. Conversations we shared revealed a perspective that I found very useful as I began to plan publicity and campus screening procedures. I asked a lot of questions—what challenges he thought I would face in serving the students on that particular campus, what he enjoyed about the work when he was involved, which parts he loathed, and most importantly, how I could keep him involved as the changing of the guard took place. If such a person exists on your campus—someone who knows a little about what has happened with national scholarships on your campus (if anything), or at a minimum how news of opportunities like the Truman can be easily disseminated to your campus’ potential Truman nominees—I suggest visiting this person right away and soliciting their help.

Learn from others who know about other national competitions

There may be people on your campus who presently serve as the campus contact for other nationally competitive scholarships. To learn from these individuals and to join forces in publicity, check the web to identify if your campus has Faculty Representatives for the Goldwater Scholarship <www.act.org/goldwater/gfacrep.htm> or the Udall Scholarship <www.udallfoundation.org/p_sch_reps.htm> or an Institutional Representative for the <Rhodes Scholarship <www.rhodessholar.org> Like the Truman, each of these competitions requires formal institutional nomination. As such, there may be people on your campus involved in similar work who can help you get started. There may also be others on your campus coordinating the British Marshall, Fulbright, and Soros scholarship competitions (which also require nomination), though these competitions’ websites do not presently include a listing of the campus contacts. Ask around. A good place to start is with your honors college or program. You may also consider calling these programs directly to ask if anyone is listed in their records as your campus’ contact.

Get to know the rules...especially timeline

Become familiar with the Truman Scholarship Program and the competition—its purpose, guidelines, timeline, eligibility, selection procedures, etc. To start, read (and then re-read) the *Bulletin of Information* <www.truman.gov/potential_bulletin.html>. It will probably be you who is contacted when clarification about the competition is needed by anyone involved in supporting a nominee. Similarly, it will probably be you who is contacted by university relations, donor relations, alumni relations, the campus newspaper, and/or the local press when word spreads about your nominee(s), particularly when a candidate is named a Finalist or Scholar.

If you know where the “rules” are, you will be able to provide quick accurate answers which can only help your effort gain momentum. The more people who know about the competition, the better off you and your candidates will be. On the Truman website, the Question & Answers for Fac Reps <www.truman.gov/faculty_qanda.html> and the Question and Answer section for potential Scholars <www.truman.gov/potential_qanda.html> are particularly helpful in preparing you to field questions from both students and campus administrators.

Thankfully, you are getting involved with a national scholarship program that provides clear information about its purpose and the process by which Scholars are selected. (Not all nationally competitive programs are as forthcoming.) If you have been charged with the institutionalizing of national scholarships (or even if you secretly wish for this to happen eventually!) know that the Truman competition is a good program to start with; Foundation staff welcome dialogue from Fac Reps, useful

information is available on the web and in print, and the very nature of the application makes the whole process less elusive than it could be for you *and* your candidates.

Use competition language in publicity and recruitment

Soon after I began working on national scholarships, I stumbled upon the value of using language consistent with competition materials in all of the programming I launched. This is probably a concept introduced in Publicity 101 but I never took that class. Perhaps you missed it, too? (When I started scholarship advising, I was working at establishing a program—a central place that would serve as the clearinghouse for local and national merit-based scholarships. If you are in a different situation in your role as Fac Rep, my advice about publicity and recruitment may not directly apply.)

In early correspondence and interactions with faculty, committee members, administrators, academic advisers, and letter writers, I was deliberate in using competition terms so that all getting involved could begin to understand which types of students made good *candidates*, what was involved in *nominating* students, at what point a student became a *nominee*, that being a *Finalist* meant that one had been invited to an interview, etc. I found explaining the Truman nomination process to be especially important since there was a “competing” definition of the term *nomination* present on my campus; unlimited numbers of faculty “nominations” were solicited for a few local competitions, competitions that resulted in varying numbers of recipients year to year.

Similarly, for students I tried to define the competition early on in each cycle as a preventative measure. On flyers, in email, and during workshops geared toward candidates, I explained terms the students would later encounter on the application and during the competition: nominee, nomination, Finalist, Scholar. Many of the students I targeted had been “nominated” by faculty members to be considered for the local awards mentioned earlier. As such, some of these students expected the same procedures to be in place for the Truman. I didn’t expect to encounter this confusion. Once I did, I knew I needed to be mindful in educating my student population on how national competitions worked, how one applied, and how the awards were given. These national processes weren’t a part of the culture when I began.

At a minimum, using language consistent with competition materials from the outset will help you prevent confusion later on and will likely increase the chances that accurate information is being spread. This can only contribute to a smoother cycle the second time around, and still a smoother cycle the third time around, etc.

Enlist support from others

If you are trying to set up a procedure that can be followed each year by you or others who will subsequently serve as Fac Reps, enlisting support on your campus early on is a good idea. (Again, if you have been approached by an interested student for the first time and/or are working against a rapidly approaching deadline this advice probably won’t apply.) Establishing a “Truman nomination team” will help spread the word about the competition and raise interest among faculty and staff who have direct contact with potential nominees. Not everyone is a good publicist, a keen proofreader, and skilled at advising students on the writing of a policy proposal. As Fac Rep you may need to fill all of these roles, but let’s hope not.

If your dean and provost don’t know about the Truman competition, ask to have short meetings with these individuals (and other members of the senior administration) to explain the opportunities offered by the

scholarship program. Having the support of a few key members of the senior administration helped tremendously as I was starting out. By keeping these individuals up-to-date, our Board of Regents, deans, and chairs heard about new programming happening in the Undergraduate Scholarship Office. These key members also shared news of our candidates being named Finalists and Scholars. Keep these folks up-to-date, especially when our nominees were named Finalists; I didn't have to start at the beginning when I asked for funding to cover the portion of the students' travel costs not covered by the Foundation. Over time, having this support from people who sat at the decision-making table helped raise the visibility of our students' achievements and the interest level in the national scholarships. Nothing extravagant was needed to keep people up-to-date; short email messages with brief candidate bios did the trick.

Establishing campus screening procedures

You can't get too far in publicizing any particular year's competition before coming up with campus screening procedures—a method by which you will identify your nominee(s). You may not have the luxury...or even have the need to...plan anything elaborate. The important thing is to find a few good candidates you can support.

Different methods work on different campuses, and different methods work in different situations. You may not need an elaborate procedure if you are working with small numbers or if, as mentioned earlier, you are working this year to send on one candidate who has approached you. Your challenge is to determine what will work in your environment, for your student population, given your time commitments.

I first started handling the Truman competition on my campus in fall 1996. As I started to learn about the competition, I noticed the deadline cycle was similar to the Goldwater competition (for science types), a competition I had coordinated for a few years. As I set my calendars for the 1996-97 school year I needed to keep in mind that I'd be running two parallel competitions that year for the first time. I opted not to set the same procedures for both though; unlike the Goldwater, the Truman process at the national level involves an interview so I figured our campus selection procedures should also. This meant that I needed to allow more time for Truman nominee selections than I would be allowing for the Goldwater. Again, think of your environment and level of support, and set procedures that work for you and your students.

Setting a Timeline

To start, think about your academic calendar. When do students come back to campus in the fall? Do your fall term courses end in early or mid-December? Are your students on campus in January? In establishing timelines, I worked backwards from the national deadline. University of Washington students are on campus in January. Our students leave campus for break in mid-December. Our academic year starts in late September and we are on the quarter system.

An example of a timeline

Listed below is the timeline I used for the Truman. We named our nominees in the fall of the junior year. Other schools name in the spring of the sophomore year. The timeline I used may or may not work for you on your campus, but it's a model nonetheless.

University of Washington Truman Scholarship timeline

Throughout school year: (<i>whenever possible</i>)	talk with faculty and advisers about the opportunity solicit names of potential candidates from faculty and advisers contact students whose names are passed along visit student groups (honor societies, student govt, clubs, etc.)
late April/early May:	“big” workshop--overview of competitions requiring nomination (<i>on a Tues, Wed or Thurs, in the early afternoon</i>)
summer:	send emails/check-in with students on the “Truman radar screen”
late Sept/early Oct:	publicize Truman competition distribute campus applications
3 rd week of October:	hold Truman workshop, including previous years’ nominees, Finalists, and/or Scholars (<i>on a Tues, Wed or Thurs, in the early afternoon</i>)
around Veteran’s Day:	campus deadline (<i>set early in the week, not on a Thurs or Fri</i>)
day after campus deadline through Thanksgiving weekend:	committee members review materials
week after Thanksgiving:	interviews (<i>in the afternoon</i>)
first Friday of December: (<i>last week of instruction</i>)	nominees named
before students leave for break:	meet with nominees (as a group preferably)
by mid-December to national deadline	work with nominees on applications, with support from committee members, and other staff faculty involved
a week (or so) before national deadline:	letter writers’ deadline (<i>acknowledge receipt as they come in</i>)
day before national deadline:	mail entire packet in overnight mail
week following national deadline:	thank all involved in effort, remind nat’l selection timeline
once Finalist(s) named:	update all involved, share news w/broader campus community schedule mock interviews
late May:	hold party celebrating all national nominees’ accomplishments and committee members’ efforts (chairs and advisers of nominees’ departments, parents, siblings, roommates, significant others, lab mates, etc. invited)

Recruiting candidates

Many Fac Reps do direct mailings to populations of students who are likely to include potential nominees as a way to publicize the Truman opportunity. Consider working with your Registrar's office to get addresses of students from specific majors and/or students who have earned a certain grade-point average (3.5+) by a certain stage of their undergraduate careers. In targeting students by academic interest, I suggest casting your net widely; departments of English and Philosophy attract publicly minded students just as departments of Political Science and Economics do.

I worked with folks on my campus who had lists of students who had received the few local scholarships we had to recruit outstanding state residents. Tediously, I looked up each student's email address one by one. Hopefully you can avoid having to do this. I also worked with our Dean's office to find students who had received funding for undergraduate research and community service projects and the University Honors Program to target students on honors scholarships.

I tried to keep colleagues up-to-date running other programs that identified "student leaders" on campus. Programs that have a peer advising component are particularly useful in this regard. At the University of Washington student leaders are used in orientation programs for new students and their parents, programs that group first-year students with similar academic interests, and pre-major and pre-professional advising. Once I got my feet beneath me, I involved staff from our internship program, honors program, advising office, community service program, undergraduate research program, peer health education program, and advisers of large undergraduate honor societies focusing on academic achievement and service.

Each year I tweaked things a bit, adding to what I'd done the year before. If these people couldn't participate as a selection committee member, I invited them to participate in mock interviews. Minimally, these people were on the look-out for potential nominees.

Some other thoughts on starting out...

- Your nominees will change and develop through this process. Preparing the Truman application challenges nominees to think about one's self and one's future in a way that few undergraduate experiences do. Because the competition happens in the junior year, this application serves as the first exercise many nominees encounter requiring them to put themselves on paper. Of course, these talented people will have many subsequent chances to present in writing their ideas, values, and plans--they all will eventually apply for other scholarships, a job, or grad school.

None of my students breezed through the application, most struggled with preparing answers to many of the items, and I think all would admit that they came out of the process with a clearer understanding of who they are, what they value, where they are headed, and what makes them tick.

- Items #9, #13, and #14 require students to think about the future....waaaay off into the future. To help nominees who had difficulty in preparing answers to these questions, I asked them to dream big and name a few agencies or organizations they'd like to work for some day. Or positions they'd like to hold eventually. For some students, this application process might prompt admitting aloud for the first time that they want to be Surgeon General. Or a senator. Or a foreign service officer. Or a doctor *and* a policy maker. Or that they want to be engaged in work none of their friends seem to understand or appreciate. Or work addressing social issues their families don't think or care about. Or in a position earning a wage lower than Mom and Dad would be comfortable earning. Or working on behalf of people

different from themselves. Take your nominees seriously and ask them a lot of questions that begin with “Why.”

Items #11 and #12 are questions that require nominees to think about their immediate futures. With the “big goals” coming into sharper focus through items #9, #13 and #14, items #11 and #12 begin to reveal the need to actually make some decisions. Nearly all of my nominees have felt some hesitation in writing anything down, as if doing so was like signing a contract, or setting these plans in stone.

- Be ready to see your nominees frustrated, confused or bewildered. (I suppose this goes with “Be ready to witness your nominees develop and change.”) As some nominees work through this application, many come up against tough questions they may have never considered before and/or questions they have been avoiding and hoping would go away. Items #7, #8, #10 and #15 in particular tend to bring out questions like, “Who am I?” “What do I stand for?” “Why am I like this?” “Why do I spend time on these activities?” “What hand in life have I been dealt and how am I playing it?” When reaching this stage, some students have expressed feeling more unsure than they have ever felt before. They feel stripped clean of all that was “them.” They may find that going beyond “I want to help people” is a struggle. I have heard many students express concern that they have been selected as a nominee by mistake, as if to say they fooled the committee. Stick with them. Of course, stick with them. I found it best to listen as my nominees expressed such concerns. After all, answers to these questions must come from the students themselves.

- Don’t be surprised to see tears of joy. (These generally come after the feelings of frustration, confusion, or bewilderment.) What a great feeling it is for students to finally finish the application! Many students feel things finally “clicked” for them during this application process. Many finally feel confident in their abilities and excited about their futures.

Lastly, many students come away from this process with a stronger connection to individuals who supported their candidacy specifically and to their institution generally. I’ve heard students share feelings of gratitude for all their institution was doing for them and disbelief that their institution was so “behind them”. We invested in our nominees (and continue to do so) because they are part of our campus community and because we believe in them, not because some scholarship committee in Denver liked what they had to say in a twenty-minute interview on a Wednesday in March. Some nominees were pleasantly overwhelmed by the interest we take in their lives and in their development.

- Expect to be affected by your nominees. And expect others involved to be affected by your nominees. When I first started out as a Fac Rep, I imagined distributing a few applications, gathering up some letters of recommendation, and popping the completed materials into the mail. Indeed a Fac Rep who does this certainly is fulfilling his/her responsibilities and candidates can gain a lot through this process.

As I started to work with nominees and as they started to “let me in” I began to take interest in these students in much the same way a dedicated faculty member invests in his doctoral students, or a coach in her athletes. As our nominees began to meet individually with committee members, faculty members and staff to discuss their applications and their futures, my phone started ringing. A small number of us were assembling, taking places in the candidate’s corner.

I am not alone as a veteran Fac Rep in expressing that I had no idea nominees would affect me the way they did. I know many Fac Reps who are still in touch with their nominees from years and years ago. From many dedicated Fac Reps, you will hear repeatedly about how helpful this process is to the students and how enjoyable the work is. One colleague recently shared, “I’m brainwashed on this stuff!” Another admitted, “My colleagues just don’t get it. They ask me, ‘Why are you spending so much time with these students? Aren’t you done with those applications yet?’ They don’t understand that I am getting more

feedback doing this work than I ever did in any classroom.” Still another shared, “These students are my priority. I care about them.”

- Prepare your Finalists and Scholars for the attention they will receive. As word spreads of a student’s competition success, many people on your campus suddenly will become interested in the students and in the work you are doing. I was not prepared (nor were my nominees) for this. One talented colleague tells nominees who are named Scholars, “You’re a celebrity now” and prepares them for how the campus and local press might respond.

I have spoken with many Scholars about how their campuses and communities responded to the news of their success. Many recalled feeling disillusioned and even used by their universities. Some expressed that it was difficult to continue as students when they were expected to attend meetings with trustees, donor dinners, photo shoots, tapings for radio commercials, galas, and football games. One student shared that she genuinely wanted to give back to her university because many people there had done so much for her but worried about these time commitments cutting in to her studying time. Prepare your Finalists and Scholars that overnight they may become the poster children for the institution.

- Set realistic expectations. It is absolutely absurd to expect to find in your first year (ever?) a large pool of campus candidates from which four outstanding nominees are selected each producing pristine applications chock full of good stuff, a few of whom will be invited to an interview, to finally have at least one Scholar named. It is equally absurd to have others expecting these results. Shoot to identify and support one strong nominee in your first year. Regardless of competition outcome, celebrate the efforts of all involved, and involve your nominee in next year’s process.

In closing, best of luck to you as you begin working with the Truman competition. Start small. Contact the Foundation with questions. Pay attention to the deadlines. And most importantly, enjoy getting to know a few students as they prepare for careers of serving others. If I can be of help to you, do get in touch. I can be reached via email at <colliand@u.washington.edu>.